WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. In a relationship between a telecommunication provider and a plurality of subscribers, a device for determining an appropriate set of addresses to which to distribute an alert, the device comprising:

at least one interface member in communication with a communication network;

a processor in communication with the at least one interface member; and

a storage medium in communication with the processor, the storage medium comprising instructions executable by the processor to:

maintain a directory of alert gateways, the directory comprising a plurality of directory entries, each directory entry being associated with a particular alert gateway and comprising at least one gateway characteristic associated with that alert gateway, the gateway characteristic including information to enable the alert distribution device to determine whether a given alert should be transmitted to the alert gateway;

maintain a distribution address associated with each of the alert gateways, the distribution address for a particular alert gateway providing sufficient identifying information about that alert gateway to allow an alert to be transmitted to the alert gateway;

associate the at least one gateway characteristic for a particular alert gateway with the distribution address for that particular alert gateway;

receive an alert via the at least one interface member, the alert having associated information about the alert;

identify, based on the information about the alert, a set of selection criteria for determining which of the plurality of alert gateways should receive the alert;

search the directory for at least one directory entry comprising a gateway characteristic corresponding to the identified selection criteria; and

identify, based on the search, a set of at least one distribution address that should receive the alert, each member of the set of distribution addresses being associated with a directory entry comprising a gateway characteristic that corresponds to the identified selection criteria.

2. The device of claim 1, wherein the at least one gateway characteristic associated with each of the alert gateways comprises information about the geographic location of the alert gateway.

3. The device of claim 2, wherein the information about the alert comprises geographic information about a geographic area to which the alert pertains, such that subscribers outside the geographic area would be relatively unlikely to be interested in receiving the alert.

4. The device of claim 1, wherein the directory entry for each alert gateway comprises information about a distribution address for that alert gateway, and wherein maintaining a distribution address associated with each of the alert gateways comprises maintaining the information about the distribution address.

5. The device of claim 1, wherein the storage medium comprises a first database, the first database comprising the directory of alert gateways.

6. The device of claim 5, wherein storage medium comprises a second database, the second database comprising the distribution addresses associated with each of the alert gateways.

7. The device of claim 1, wherein the at least one gateway characteristic associated with an alert gateway comprises information selected from the group consisting of the area code in which the alert gateway is located, the ZIP code in which the alert gateway is located, the latitude and longitude coordinates of the alert gateway, the Global Positioning System coordinates of the alert gateway, demographic information about a subscriber associated with the alert gateway, and information about subscriber preferences held by a subscriber associated with the alert gateway.

8. The device of claim 1, wherein the alert comprises urgent public information.

9. The device of claim 8, wherein the urgent public information is selected from a group consisting of an Emergency Alert System transmission, an Amber Alert, a severe weather notification, and a Homeland Security Advisory notification.

10. The device of claim 1, wherein the information about the alert is incorporated within the alert.

11. The device of claim 1, wherein the alert information about the alert is additional to the alert.

12. The device of claim 1, wherein the storage medium comprises further instructions executable by the processor to extract from the alert the information about the alert.

13. The device of claim 1, wherein the communication network is selected from a group consisting of a radio-frequency transmission, a telephone network, a cable television distribution network, the Internet, a fiber-optic network, a high-speed data network, a wireless network, and a microwave network.

14. The device of claim 1, wherein the communication network is a plurality of communication networks and wherein, for a particular distribution address, the device is configured to select the most appropriate communication network via which to transmit the alert information to the particular distribution address.

15. In a relationship between a telecommunication provider and a plurality of subscribers, a method for determining an appropriate set of addresses to which to distribute an alert, the method comprising:

maintaining a directory of alert gateways, the directory comprising a plurality of directory entries, each directory entry being associated with a particular alert gateway and comprising at least one gateway characteristic associated with that alert gateway, the gateway characteristic including information to enable the alert distribution device to determine whether a given alert should be transmitted to the alert gateway;

maintaining a distribution address associated with each of the alert gateways, the distribution address for a particular alert gateway providing sufficient identifying information about that alert gateway to allow an alert to be transmitted to the alert gateway;

associating the at least one gateway characteristic for a particular alert gateway with the distribution address for that particular alert gateway;

receiving an alert, the alert having associated information about the alert;

identifying, based on the information about the alert, a set of selection criteria for determining which of the plurality of alert gateways should receive the alert;

searching the directory for at least one directory entry comprising a gateway characteristic corresponding to the identified selection criteria; and

identifying, based on the search, a set of at least one distribution address that should receive the alert, each member of the set of distribution addresses being associated with a directory entry comprising a gateway characteristic that corresponds to the identified selection criteria.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the at least one gateway characteristic associated with each of the alert gateways comprises information about the geographic location of the alert gateway.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein the information about the alert comprises geographic information about a geographic area to which the alert pertains, such that subscribers outside the geographic area would be relatively unlikely to be interested in receiving the alert.

18. The method of claim 15, wherein the directory entry for each alert gateway comprises information about a distribution address for that alert gateway, and wherein maintaining a distribution address associated with each of the alert gateways comprises maintaining the information about the distribution address.

19. The method of claim 15, wherein the directory of alert gateways comprises a first database.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the distribution address associated with each of the alert gateways are maintained in a second database.

21. The method of claim 15, wherein the at least one gateway characteristic associated with an alert gateway comprises information selected from the group consisting of the area code in which the alert gateway is located, the ZIP code in which the alert gateway is located, the latitude and longitude coordinates of the alert gateway, the Global Positioning System coordinates of the alert gateway, demographic information about a subscriber associated with the alert gateway, and information about subscriber preferences held by a subscriber associated with the alert gateway.

22. The method of claim 15, wherein the alert comprises urgent public information.

23. The method of claim 8, wherein the urgent public information is selected from a group consisting of an Emergency Alert System transmission, an Amber Alert, a severe weather notification, and a Homeland Security Advisory notification.

24. The method of claim 15, wherein the information about the alert is incorporated within the alert.

25. The method of claim 15, wherein the alert information about the alert is additional to the alert.

26. The method of claim 15, further comprising extracting from the alert the information about the alert.

27. In a relationship between a telecommunication provider and a plurality of subscribers, a system for distributing an alert to an appropriate set of subscribers, the system comprising:

a plurality of alert gateways configured to receive an alert, each of the plurality of alert gateways being associated with at least one subscriber;

a communication network in communication with the plurality of alert gateways; and

an alert distribution device in communication with the communication network, the alert distribution device comprising:

at least one interface member in communication with the network;

a processor in communication with the at least one interface member; and

a storage medium in communication with the processor, the storage medium comprising instructions executable by the processor to:

maintain a directory of alert gateways, the directory comprising a plurality of directory entries, each directory entry being associated with a particular alert gateway and comprising at least one gateway characteristic associated with that alert gateway, the gateway characteristic including

information to enable the alert distribution device to determine whether a given alert should be transmitted to the alert gateway;

maintain a distribution address associated with each of the alert gateways, the distribution address for a particular alert gateway providing sufficient identifying information about that alert gateway to allow an alert to be transmitted to the alert gateway;

associate the at least one gateway characteristic for a particular alert gateway with the distribution address for that particular alert gateway;

receive an alert via the at least one interface member, the alert having associated information about the alert;

identify, based on the information about the alert, a set of selection criteria for determining which of the plurality of alert gateways should receive the alert;

search the directory for at least one directory entry comprising a gateway characteristic corresponding to the identified selection criteria;

identify, based on the search, a set of at least one distribution address that should receive the alert, each member of the set of distribution addresses being associated with a directory entry comprising a gateway characteristic that corresponds to the identified selection criteria; and

using the at least one interface member, transmit the alert via the network to a set of alert gateways, each member of the set of alert gateways being associated with a member of the set of distribution addresses.

28. The system of claim 27, wherein the at least one gateway characteristic associated with each of the alert gateways comprises information about the geographic location of the alert gateway.

29. The system of claim 28, wherein the information about the alert comprises geographic information about a geographic area to which the alert pertains, such that subscribers outside the geographic area would be relatively unlikely to be interested in receiving the alert.

30. The system of claim 27, wherein the directory entry for each alert gateway comprises information about a distribution address for that alert gateway, and

wherein maintaining a distribution address associated with each of the alert gateways comprises maintaining the information about the distribution address.

31. The system of claim 27, wherein the storage medium comprises a first database, the first database comprising the directory of alert gateways.

32. The system of claim 31, wherein storage medium comprises a second database, the second database comprising the distribution addresses associated with each of the alert gateways.

33. The system of claim 27, wherein the at least one gateway characteristic associated with an alert gateway comprises information selected from the group consisting of the area code in which the alert gateway is located, the ZIP code in which the alert gateway is located, the latitude and longitude coordinates of the alert gateway, the Global Positioning System coordinates of the alert gateway, demographic information about a subscriber associated with the alert gateway, and information about subscriber preferences held by a subscriber associated with the alert gateway.

34. The system of claim 27, wherein at least one of the plurality of alert gateways is incorporated within a network interface device.

35. The system of claim 27, wherein at least one of the plurality of alert gateways is in communication with a network interface device.

36. The system of claim 27, wherein the alert comprises urgent public information.

37. The system of claim 36, wherein the urgent public information is selected from a group consisting of an Emergency Alert System transmission, an Amber Alert, a severe weather notification, and a Homeland Security Advisory notification.

38. The system of claim 27, wherein the information about the alert is incorporated within the alert.

39. The system of claim 27, wherein the alert information about the alert is additional to the alert.

40. The system of claim 27, wherein the storage medium comprises further instructions executable by the processor to extract from the alert the information about the alert.

41. The system of claim 27, wherein the communication network is selected from a group consisting of a radio-frequency transmission, a telephone network, a cable television distribution network, the Internet, a fiber-optic network, a high-speed data network, a wireless network, and a microwave network.

42. The system of claim 27, wherein the communication network is a plurality of communication networks and wherein, for a particular distribution address, the alert distribution device is configured to select the most appropriate communication network via which to transmit the alert information to the particular distribution address.

43. In a relationship between a telecommunication provider and a plurality of subscribers, a system for distributing an alert to an appropriate set of subscribers, the system comprising:

a plurality of alert gateways configured to receive an alert, each of the plurality of alert gateways having a geographic location, and each of the plurality of alert gateways being associated with at least one subscriber;

a network configured to provide communication with the plurality of alert gateways; and

an alert distribution device comprising:

at least one interface member in communication with the network;

a processor in communication with the at least one interface member; and

a storage medium in communication with the processor, the storage medium comprising instructions executable by the processor to:

maintain a database of alert gateways, the database comprising a plurality of database records, each database record being associated with an alert gateway and comprising location information about the geographic location of that alert gateway;

maintain a distribution address associated with each of the alert gateways, the distribution address for an alert gateway providing sufficient

identifying information about that alert gateway to allow an alert to be transmitted to the alert gateway;

associate the at least one gateway characteristic for a particular alert gateway with the distribution address for that particular alert gateway;

receive an alert via the at least one interface member, the alert comprising information about a geographic area to which the alert pertains, such that subscribers outside the geographic area would be relatively unlikely to be interested in receiving the alert;

identify, based on the information about the geographic area to which the alert pertains, a set of geographic criteria for determining which of the plurality of alert gateways should receive the alert;

search the database for at least one directory entry comprising location information meeting the set of geographic criteria;

identify, based on the search, a set of at least one distribution address that should receive the alert, each of the set of distribution addresses associated with a directory entry comprising location information meeting the set of geographic criteria; and

using the at least one interface member, transmit the alert via the network to a set of alert gateways, each member of the set of alert gateways being associated with a member of the set of distribution addresses.

44. The system of claim 43, wherein at least one of the plurality of alert gateways is incorporated within a network interface device.

45. The system of claim 43, wherein at least one of the plurality of alert gateways is in communication with a network interface device.

46. The system of claim 43, wherein the alert comprises urgent public information.

47. The system of claim 46, wherein the urgent public information is selected from a group consisting of an Emergency Alert System transmission, an Amber Alert, a severe weather notification, and a Homeland Security Advisory notification.

48. The system of claim 43, wherein the location information is selected from the group consisting of the area code in which the alert gateway is located, the ZIP code

in which the alert gateway is located, the latitude and longitude coordinates of the alert gateway, and the Global Positioning System coordinates of the alert gateway.

49. In a relationship between a telecommunication provider and a plurality of subscribers, a method for distributing an alert to an appropriate set of subscribers, the method comprising:

maintaining a database of alert gateways, the database comprising a plurality of database records, each database record being associated with an alert gateway and comprising location information about the geographic location of that alert gateway;

maintaining a distribution address associated with each of the alert gateways, the distribution address for an alert gateway providing sufficient identifying information about that alert gateway to allow an alert to be transmitted to the alert gateway;

associating the at least one gateway characteristic for a particular alert gateway with the distribution address for that particular alert gateway;

receiving an alert via the at least one interface member, the alert comprising information about a geographic area to which the alert pertains, such that subscribers outside the geographic area would be relatively unlikely to be interested in receiving the alert;

identifying, based on the information about the geographic area to which the alert pertains, a set of geographic criteria for determining which of the plurality of alert gateways should receive the alert;

searching the database for at least one directory entry comprising location information meeting the set of geographic criteria;

identifying, based on the search, a set of at least one distribution address that should receive the alert, each member of the set of distribution addresses being associated with a directory entry comprising location information meeting the set of geographic criteria; and

transmitting the alert to a set of alert gateways, each member of the set of alert gateways being associated with a member of the set of distribution addresses.

50. The method of claim 49, wherein at least one of the plurality of alert gateways is incorporated within a network interface device.

51. The method of claim 49, wherein at least one of the plurality of alert gateways is in communication with a network interface device.

52. The method of claim 49, wherein the location information is selected from the group consisting of the area code in which the alert gateway is located, the ZIP code in which the alert gateway is located, the latitude and longitude coordinates of the alert gateway, and the Global Positioning System coordinates of the alert gateway.

53. The method of claim 49, wherein the alert comprises urgent public information.

54. The method of claim 53, wherein the urgent public information is selected from a group consisting of an Emergency Alert System transmission, an Amber Alert, a severe weather notification, and a Homeland Security Advisory notification.